

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 049

INFO USCINCSO FOR POLAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 CARACAS 4644

EO 11652: XGDS

TAGS: PINT VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN POLITICS: POLITICAL ASSESMENT OF DEPARTING  
COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS

FOLLOWING IS PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF VENEZUELA' S POLITICAL FUTURE  
DRAFTED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR LUERS PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM  
VENEZUELA AFTER FOUR YEARS HERE: SUMMARY: COPEI MOST LIKELY TO WIN  
ELECTIONS BY NARROW MARGIN IN DECEMBER 1973, ALTHOUGH FACTORS SUCH  
AS RISING COST OF LIVING COULD SHIFT BALANCE TOWARD AD. IF COPEI  
WINS, POST ELECTORAL PERIOD WILL BE DIFFICULT AND MILITARY PLOTTING  
WILL MOUNT, BUT CALDERA AND BETANCOURT PRESTIGE WILL CARRY DAY AND  
LORENZO FERNANDEZ WILL BE INAUGURATED IN MARCH 1974. LORENZO' S  
BIGGEST PROBLEM WILL BE HIS INSECURITIES ABOUT HIMSELF AND ABOUT  
US, BUT HE LIKELY TO FORM GOVERNMENT THAT WILL BE BROADER BASED  
THAN THAT OF CALDERA. BIG PROBLEM FOR EXPECTED MINORITY GOVERNMENT  
WILL BE ALLIANCES IN CONGRESS. AD LIKELY TO BE DEEPLY DIVIDED AND  
REFUSE TO ENTER AGREEMENT WITH COPEI AT LEAST FOR FIRST YEAR,  
LEAVING OPENING FOR LEFT WHICH MAY HAVE 12-20 O/ O OF VOTE OR PJ  
RIGHT (10-15 O/ O). COPEI LIKELY TO MOVE LEFT WHICH COULD CAUSE  
DIFFICULTIES FOR US AND OIL COMPANIES IF US GOVERNMENT NOT PREPARED  
OR IN POSITION TO DEVOTE TIME AND CARE TO NEW ADMINISTRATION. END  
SUMMARY

1. STABILITY OF VENEZUELAN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IS DUE TO COMBINATION  
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OF FACTORS: PETROLEUM RICHES WHICH PROVIDE GROWTH AND SUBSTANTIAL IF INEFFICIENT SOCIAL BENEFITS; LACK OF ENTRENCHED LANDED ARISTOCRACY AND ABSENCE OF LEWIS' " CYCLE OF POVERTY" IN BARRIOS; CONTINUING STRENGTH AND LEFT- OF- CENTER ORIENTATION OF VENEZUELA' S TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES; EXPANDING MIDDLE CLASS WHICH IS NOW ONE OF LARGEST IN LA; AND RELATIVE NOVELTY OF DEMOCRACY HERE. YET STRAINS ON THIS POLITICAL STABILITY WILL BE SIGNIFICANT IN NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, BROUGHT ABOUT BY ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, DESPAIR OVER INEFFECTIVENESS OF SYSTEM, MEDIOCRITY OF SECOND GENERATION OF AD AND COPEI POLITICAL LEADERS, AND LEFTIST POLITICALIZATION OF VENEZUELA' S YOUTH AND GROWING MARGINAL POPULATION. ALTHOUGH WE FULLY EXPECT ELECTIONS TO BE HELD IN DECEMBER 1973, SOME LEADING VENEZUELAN DOUBT THAT PRESENT SYSTEM WILL SURVIVE TILL 1978 ELECTIONS. NEXT VENEZUELAN ADMINISTRATION CAN BE EXPECTED BE EVEN MORE NATIONALIST THAN CALDERA' S AND PROBABLY TRY TO ADOPT MORE " PROGRESSIVE" DOMESTIC POLICIES WITH REGARD TO PRIVATE SECTOR AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT. POLLS INDICATE THAT VAST MAJORITY OF VENEZUELAN, WHILE OVERWHELMINGLY OPPOSED TO COMMUNISM, FAVOR SOCIALISM AND SIGNIFICANT EXPANSION OF PUBLIC SECTOR -- THESE POLLS NOT LOST ON CURRENT POLITICAL LEADERS.

2. POLARIZATION. CURRENT PHENOMENON IN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN POLARIZATION OF POLITICAL SCENE HERE THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE ON REAL AND IMAGINED LEVEL. ADECOS AND COPEYANOS DELIGHT IN SPEAKING OF POLARIZATION OF POLITICAL FORCES BETWEEN TWO MAJOR PARTIES -- A FACTOR BEING BROUGHT ABOUT BY TOP LEVEL DEALS WITH MALL AND MINI- PARTY LEADERS INVOLVING ENORMOUS SUMS OF MONEY. REAL POLARIZATION HERE HOWEVER IS TAKING PLACE BETWEEN ESTABLISHMENT PARTIES ( COPEI, AD AND SATELLITES) AND ANTI- SYSTEM OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH IRONICALLY TWO MAJOR PARTIES MAY GARNER LARGER AGGREGATE PERCENTAGE OF VOTE IN CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS THAN IN 1968 ( PERHAPS AS MUCH AS 55-60 O/ O) GROUPS IN OPPOSITION TO THESE PARTIES WILL BE HARDER TO INCORPORATE INTO AD AND COPEI WAYS. THANKS TO EFFORTS OF MAS AND OTHER EFFECTIVE LEFTIST AND PJ PROPAGANDA THAT HAS FLOURISHED UNDER CALDERA' S PACIFICATION PROGRAM, POOR ARE BEING POLITICIZED AND TERRORISM OF 1960' S BEING FORGOTTEN. THIS HAS SOME IMPACT ON ATTITUDES OF POLITICAL LEADERS WHO THREE YEARS AGO FREELY ASSOCIATED WITH EACH OTHER REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL AFFILIATION BUT WHO NOW CANNOT EVEN ENJOY SCOTCH AND SODA IN COMMON.

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3. ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. TENSION OF ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN IS LIKELY TO INCREASE OVER COMING MONTHS, WITH SMALLER GROUPS SUCH AS NEW FORCE

AND PROBABLY MAS INCREASING SIGNIFICANTLY QUANTITY AND SHRILLNESS OF THEIR PROPAGANDA IN LAST TWO MONTHS. AD AND COPEI WILL UNCOVER SCANDALS AND COUNTER- SCANDALS, BUT CALDERA AND BETANCOURT WILL TRY TO KEEP LID ON MORE VOLATILE PARTY LEADERS. FACTORS INFLUENCING

VOTING WILL PROBABLY REMAIN PART FROM CAMPAGIN ITSELF HOWEVER. COST OF LIVING WILL BE IMPORTANT FACTOR AND GOVERNMENT WILL TRY DESPERATELY TO KEEP RISE TO MINIMUM. MOREOVER GYRATIONS AND ACTIONS OF PRESIDENT CALDERA ( WHO IS EXPECTED TO MAKE TRIP TO MEXICO, POSSIBLY CARIBBEAN, AND SOME OPEC COUNTRIES IN COMING MONTHS) LIKELY TO FAVOR CANDIDACY OF COPEI' S LORENZO FERNANDEZ. CALDERA MAY EVEN TRY SOME DRAMATICS SUCH AS RECOGNITION OF CUBA TO SPICE HIS PARTY' S CAMPAIGN. GOVERNMENT WILL USE ITS POWERS TO MAXIMUM INFLUENCE ON VOTERS AND EXTRA- LEGAL METHODS WILL ABOUND.

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4. ELECTION PROSPECTS. COPEI' S CANDIDATE LORENZO FERNANDEZ NOW APPEARS RPT APPEARS TO HAVE SLIGHT EDGE OVER AD' S CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ ( CAP), MEANING THAT UNLESS NEW FACTORS ENTER PICTURE FERNANDEZ MAY WELL BE NEXT PRESIDENT OF VENEZUELA. AD CAMPAIGN MORE VIGOROUS, BUT LESS IMAGINATIVE THAN COPEI' S. DESPITE OBVIOUS SUPERIORITY OF AD CANDIDATE PEREZ IN TERMS OF INTELLIGENCE, PHYSICAL ENDURANCE, AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS, COPEI MACHINE, ALLIANCES, AND LACK OF SCRUPLES WHEN IT COMES TO USE OF DEMAGOGUERY OF ILLEGAL TACTICS WILL CARRY DAY FOR COLORLESS FERNANDEZ. EVEN THOUGH RECENT POLLS SHOW CAP INCREASING STRENGTH AT EXPENSE OF LORENZO, COPEI IS LIKELY TO MANAGE TO ATTRACT LARGER SEGMENT OF UNCOMMITTED VOTE THAN AD. NARROW MARGIN OF VICTORY EXPECTED TO BE BETWEEN 1-3 PERCENT OF TOTAL VOTE, AND EVEN IF AD WINS THIS NARROW MARGIN WILL RESULT IN TEMPORARY INSTABILITY OWING

TO INTENSE RUMORS OF MILITARY PLOTTING AND CHARGES OF FRAUD. ESSENTIAL SANITY OF CALDERA AND BETANCOURT AND MAJOR PARTY LEADERS, COMBINED WITH BASIC RELUCTANCE OF SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS TO SUPPLANT CIVIL RULE WILL ENABLE PRESIDENT- ELECT TO ASSUME OFFICE IN MARCH 1974. FERNANDEZ WILL ENTER OFFICE AS MINORITY PRESIDENT WITH COPEI HAVING BETWEEN 25-30 O/ O OF CONGRESSIONAL SEATS AND WILL NEED ALLIANCE WITH OTHER GROUPS TO GOVERN. DEEP AD DIVISIONS OVER ISSUE OF COLLABORATION WITH COPEI IN CALDERA PERIOD AND CONSERVATIVE PEREZ LEADERSHIP WILL LIKELY MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT GESTURE OF

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FRIENDSHIP LORENZO WILL OFFER MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY, WHICH WILL ALSO CONTROL 25-30 O/ O OF SEATS. THEREFORE COPEI WILL HAVE TO SEEK TEMPORARY DEALS WITH LEFT ( MAS AND NEW FORCE TOGETHER MAY HAVE 12-20 O/ O OF CONGRESS) PLUS COPEI CREATURES SUCH AS FDP AND MPJ AND PART OF PJ RIGHT, WHICH COULD HAVE AGGEGATE OF 10-15 O/ O DEPENDING SOMEWHAT ON SIZE OF " NULL VOTES," WHICH WILL BE PERMITTED FOR FIRST TIME IN VENEZUELA, WHERE ALL CITIZENS 18 AND OVER REQUIRED TO VOTE.

5. FIRST YEAR OF LORENZO' S GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKELY BE EVEN MORE CHAOTIC THAN CALDERA' S. BUT, AS PRESIDENT, LORENZO IS LIKELY TO PROVE FAR MORE FLEXIBLE AND LESS SECTARIAN THAN CALDERA. HE WILL DEPEND MORE ON CABINET AND CLOSE ADVISERS ( INCLUDING CALDERA HIM-SELF) AND WILL DRAW HIS MINISTERS FROM WIDER POLITICAL SPECTRUM THAN CALDERA. BUT LORENZO' S HAND WILL NOT BE FIRM AND SHOULD HE FEEL TOO INSECURE IN HIS JOB HE COULD APPOINT TO KEY JOBS TOO MANY YOUNG TOUGHS NOW RUNNING HIS CAMPAIGN. BIG DANGER OF FERNANDEZ PRESIDENCY WILL BE MAN' S OWN STRONG SENSE OF INADEQUACY. YET ITS STRENGTH WILL BE ESSENTIAL GOOD INSTINCTS OF MAN WHO IS RESPECTED FOR HIS HONESTY, IF NOT HIS INTELLIGENCE AND STRENGTH OF CHARACTER, BY MOST VENE- ZUELANS. LORENZO' S INSTINCTS AND ADVISORS LIKELY TO MOVE HIM TO LEFT BUT NOT RADICALLY SO -- HIS " HAND WOULD TREMBLE" IN SIGNING NATIONALIZATION OR FURTHER LAWS RESTRICTING PETROLEUM COMPANIES AND PRIVATE SECTOR, BUT IF HE FEELS TRAPPED HE MAY DO SO IN DESPERATION.

6. SHOULD SITUATION CHANGE IN NEXT FEW MONTHS AND AD CANDIDATE CAP WIN, POST- ELECTORAL PERIOD LIKELY TO BE MORE STABLE FROM STANDPOINT OF MILITARY AND UPPER CLASSES SINCE MOST TOP MILITARY OFFICERS AND " OLIGARCHA" PROBABLY PREFER CAP. BUT LEFT WOULD FEEL OUTRAGE AND WOULD BEGIN INTENSE CAMPAIGN OF OPPOSITION TO AD GOVERNMENT THAT COULD REVIVE INSURGENCY MOVEMENTS. COPEI FOR ITS PART COULD PROBABLY WORK MORE EASILY WITH AD EVENTUALLY THAN VICE- VERSA. EVEN THOUGH CAP WOULD BE MORE SECURE AND POSITIVE FIGURE IN PRESIDENCY, OVER PERIOD OF HIS TERM HE IS NOT LIKELY TO BE EASY FOR PRIVATE SECTOR OR US TO DEAL WITH, PARTICULARLY ON PETROLEUM. AD TOO WOULD MOVE LEFT DOMESTICALLY AND WOULD CONTINUE NATIONALIST STAND ON PETROLEUM.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR US. BIG PROBLEM FOR US WILL BE THAT LORENZO AND MANY OF HIS PRINCIPAL ADVISORS, ESPECIALLY FROM COPEI YOUTH, HAVE EVEN STRONGER FEELINGS AGAINST US THAN CALDERA' S ADVISORS AND ARE LESS RESTRAINED IN EXPRESSING THEM. EMOTIONS INVOLVED IN SOME

OF THESE FEELINGS RUN HIGH AND MAJOR EFFORT OF US GOVERNMENT SHOULD

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BE TO TRY TO MOLLIFY THESE FEELINGS WHILE DEFENDING SENSIBLY OUR INTERESTS WITH REGARD TO PETROLEUM. PRESIDENT NIXON'S POLICY OF MATURE RELATIONSHIP HAS BEEN RECEIVED WELL HERE AND IS CONSISTENT WITH STRONG FEELINGS OF COPEYANOS THAT US SHOULD TREAT THEM AS EQUALS. BUT IN REALITY COPEYANOS BELIEVE VENEZUELA SHOULD BE TREATED AS MAJOR POWER. IN DEFENSE OF THESE COPEI ANXIETIES, REPORTING OFFICER HAS RECOGNIZED JUSTIFICATION OF THEIR CHARGES THAT US POLICY AND SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OFTEN SEEM INSENSITIVE TO THESE LATIN FEELINGS, AND ACTUAL STYLE OF US POLICY DOES NOT ALWAYS JIBE WITH OUR CLAIMS THAT WE ARE NO LONGER PATERNALISTIC.

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7. IF WE ARE GOING TO REACH AN AGREEMENT WITH VENEZUELA ON PETROLEUM DURING NEXT VENEZUELAN ADMINISTRATION HIGH- LEVEL OFFICIALS OF US GOVERNMENT ARE GOING TO HAVE TO DEVOTE TIME AND ATTENTION TO THIS MATTER AND TREAT IT AS MAJOR FOREIGN POLICY STEP INVOLVING

LONG RANGE SECURITY OF US. EVEN THOUGH VENEZUELA WILL CONTINUE TO CONTRIBUTE LESS AND LESS, PERCENTAGE- WISE, TO OUR ENERGY IMPORTS,

ITS CONTRIBUTION WILL BE ONE CRUCIAL PART OF OUR GLOOMY ENERGY PICTURE FOR NEXT 20 YEARS. EXPLOITATION OF ORINOCO TAR BELT COULD PROVIDE VITAL NEW RESERVES. WITH THIS IN MIND SENIOR US OFFICIALS MUST CROOK THEIR NECKS SOUTHWARD OR ELSE POSSIBLY MISS A CHANCE FOR AN AGREEMENT, OWING TO MISJUDGED INTENTIONS AND HURT FEELINGS, AS ABSURD AS THIS SOUNDS. ALTHOUGH THIS REPORTING OFFICER IS NO LATIN EXPERT IT APPEARS TO HIM THAT THE MAJOR BLUNDERS IN LATIN POLICY OVER THE PAST DECADES HAVE STEMMED FROM THAT LACK OF ATTENTION, MISJUDGMENTS, STALE SLOGANRY AND FAILURE TO APPRECIATE AND DEAL WITH LATIN STYLE OF CONDUCTING RELATIONS.

8. FOR VENEZUELA. WHETHER VENEZUELAN LEADERS REALIZE IT OR NOT THEY NEED EARLIEST POSSIBLE START TO INCREASE PETROLEUM RESERVES OR ELSE NEXT FIVE YEARS WILL SEE DRAMATIC CHANGE IN SUPERFICIAL FLOURISHING OF THIS ECONOMY. ROCKETING PRICES OF OIL ARE NOT LIKELY TO COMPENSATE SUFFICIENTLY FOR DECLINE IN PRODUCTION AND  
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NEXT GOVERNMENT MUST DEAL RAPIDLY WITH THIS PROBLEM. POLITICAL REALITIES HERE WILL MEAN INERTIA WILL HOLD FOR AT LEAST FIRST YEAR, EVEN THOUGH NEW GOVERNMENT WILL SET ABOUT EARLY TO DISCUSS WAYS IN WHICH NEW ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE REACHED AND OLD CONCESSIONS CAN BE MODIFIED. " PARTICIPATION," EARLY REVERSION, JOINT VENTURES, AND CONSORTIUMS WILL BE DISCUSSED BUT DIRECTION WILL NOT BE CLEAR FOR MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS. EVEN THOUGH GOVERNMENT MAY FIND IT NECESSARY TO MAKE UP SHORTFALLS IN BUDGET BY INCREASING DOMESTIC ( PARTICULARLY INCOME) TAXES THIS WILL ONLY BE STOP- GAP MEASURE. IN THIS SITUATION US ATTITUDES AND ABILITIES COULD PLAY IMPORTANT ROLE, PARTICULARLY IF LORENZO FERNANDEZ IS PRESIDENT. HE WILL HAVE TO BE CATERED TO IN MANNER WE MAY NOT BE EQUIPPED TO HANDLE AND INDEED WE MAY DECIDE ENTIRE MATTER NOT WORTH EFFORT AND TO BEST LET VENEZUELAN STRUGGLE WITH THEIR OWN PROBLEMS. BUT THIS LATTER COURSE COULD LEAD TO NATIONALIZATION OF US COMPANIES AND EVEN GREATER LONG- RUN TENSIONS WITH THIS IMPORTANT OIL SUPPLIER. FOR THE FUTURE THEREFORE WE ARE LIKELY TO GET OUT OF VENEZUELA AS MUCH " ENERGY" AS WE ARE PREPARED TO PUT INTO IT. AND IF WE BLOW IT, SO MIGHT LORENZO, AND THEN WE WOULD HAVE A NEW SITUATION THAT COULD VERY WELL BE WORSE.  
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